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AUTHOR Hall, William C.
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ABSTRACT

This paper considers links between the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system in Australia and industry and raises issues for discussion. The first section describes TAFE and its background, followed by descriptions of the links between TAFE and industry at the national, system, college, and individual levels. According to the research, national links have been developed directly through structural changes and less directly through political pressure. System links have developed through structural changes also. Common features of these links are the separation of policy formulation from delivery, integration of some Commonwealth activity within the state/territory structure, a reduction in the number of advisory bodies, an emphasis on cost recovery--especially when providing training to industry, and attempts to break the on-the-job/off-the-job dichotomy. A major curriculum push in all systems and across industry is for the widespread introduction of competency-based training. Colleges are linked to industry in many ways, especially through shared equipment, facilities, and staff, and development of courses for industries. In addition, individual lecturers have made links with particular businesses through consultancies. Issues to be explored in the future include the definition of TAFE and the use of its acronym, planning, changes needed, college-based and industry-based programs, controls, student needs, and social justice. (KC)

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TAFE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

LINKS BETWEEN TAFE AND INDUSTRY: A TAFE PERSPECTIVE

A Discussion Paper

William C. Hall

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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LINKS BETWEEN TAFE AND INDUSTRY:
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A Discussion Paper

William C. Hall
TAFE National Centre for Research and Development Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

This brief paper considers links between TAFE and industry, and raises issues for discussion. It was first prepared for the VEETAC TAFE Operations and Co-ordination Committee. Because of the paper's required short length, it is unavoidably very general in its approach and particular examples are mostly not given. The intention is to challenge, to raise issues for discussion (without giving 'the' answer), and to help improve what is already impressive. And it *is* impressive, especially at the College level where strong links have existed for years.

Information on current practices was provided by the Centre's Liaison Officers. Many of the Centre's own publications were also consulted and these are listed at the end of the paper.

An important question is: What is TAFE? Some years ago the answer was simple: TAFE was a head office with colleges. That can no longer be the answer because training boundaries are diffuse and responsibilities are not clear cut. Also, head offices have become central (co-ordinating) groups.

Where does TAFE go in order to get industry representation: employer groups; professional bodies; unions? Who speaks for 'industry'? Similarly, how is 'industry' to be defined?

The public sector has been largely ignored in TAFE/industry considerations and yet it is our largest single industry. Clearly, fundamental matters such as these must first be considered when dealing with TAFE/industry links.

BACKGROUND

Although in recent years the only consistent feature to TAFE has been constant change (for example, since the mid-1980s there have been 30 different Ministers responsible for TAFE and 29 different TAFE Directors), nevertheless the change has been moving in definite directions. Those directions within states/territories that are relevant to this paper include:

- the bringing together of TAFE and employment/training (including Commonwealth training provision within states/territories, notably ITCs);

- the enlarging of TAFE's vision, so that its emphasis is no longer almost exclusively on delivery;

- a push to make TAFE more 'entrepreneurial' (whatever that means! Also, it should be noted that the term is no longer acceptable in business circles);

- the devolution of responsibility from central offices to regions or colleges (but frequently without accompanying training);

- the development of a co-operative national approach (and in this TAFE is far ahead of schools and universities).

During the past year or so the major external pressures on TAFE (relevant to this paper) have been:

- *political* (e.g. the Deveson enquiry, which produced extremely general findings capable of wide interpretation, but which was then used immediately politically to produce important changes);

- *demographic* (e.g. there is a growing realisation that TAFE's clients are changing and that some of the traditional clients might be better serviced by other organisations);

- *educational* (e.g. the substantial impact *on TAFE* of the recent changes to higher education have not yet been fully grasped, including TAFE's filling of the middle-level vacuum that will be created; and the financial implications of competency-based training have yet to be calculated);

- *structural* (e.g. the establishment of VEETAC and the NTB); and

- *industrial*, with industry restructuring being the most important pressure.

It is against this complex background that TAFE has been continuing to develop links with industry. These are now outlined.

LINKS BETWEEN TAFE AND INDUSTRY

The links are considered at different levels: national, system, college and individual.

National links

National links have been developed directly through structural changes and less directly through political pressure. The formation of a Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) was a forth-right and definite political statement, for example, which has been picked up by almost all states/territories. (However, it could be argued that the scrapping of TAFEC was also a message of a different kind!)

(Interestingly, the opposition coalition has still not brought together employment/training and education.) The formation of bodies such as the National Training Board (NTB) and the Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC) are attempts to bring together TAFE and industry. They do this through the composition of their boards and through many of their activities. For example, the NTB's encouragement of occupational standards competencies is helping to achieve this.

The recent initiatives for forging national links have sometimes been the Commonwealth's, with states/territories occasionally being reluctant (and perhaps suspicious) participants. For example, there is presently some suspicion of VEETAC amongst some states/territories, and yet the states/territories are the majority members.

It seems likely that VEETAC with its committees and working parties could be the major national structural link between TAFE and industry. However, the present structure does not give industry 'ownership'. VEETAC is regarded as a bureaucratic body.

VEETAC needs to develop plans for a national training 'system'. It needs to ensure that TAFE, private training and on-the-job training are part of such a 'system'. This is a major challenge.

System (and regional) links

The formation of DEET apparently catalysed structural changes which had been in mind for some years within states/territories. There have been common features to these changes, including:

- separation of policy formulation from delivery;
- integration of some Commonwealth activity (notably ITCs) within the state/territory structure;
- a reduction in the number of advisory bodies;
- an emphasis on cost recovery, especially when providing training to industry;
- attempts to break the on-the-job/off-the-job dichotomy.

There does seem to be an assumption by some that boxes, joined by lines, will solve most of the TAFE/industry relationship problems, especially if a

'tame' industrialist can be persuaded to chair the lead committee! This seems to be unduly optimistic, especially if appropriate legislative changes have not taken place.

The importance of workplace literacy and numeracy is being increasingly recognised by industry, but other social justice matters seem to have little (or no) status in their thinking. This could have systems' funding implications. (We are presently in a buyer's market. There is a need to improve selection procedures for employers, and TAFE could help in this.)

A major curriculum push in all systems and across industry is for the widespread introduction of competency-based training. The essential assessment component of competency-based training has been mostly neglected by industry (and by TAFE for that matter), and so the very considerable problems arising from such neglect will soon emerge unless there is immediate remedial action. Indeed, the solving of major, national assessment policy issues is one of the country's main priorities for systems.

Another important, current, problem is the sharp decrease in the number of apprentices. If this continues, the consequences are obvious, and this will be especially acute when the economy rejuvenates.

This is not the place to describe the impact of industry restructuring. Industry alone is incapable of achieving the training demands of restructuring and so TAFE is now expected to provide a wide range of services. These services will rarely lead to increases in students exposed to traditional TAFE delivery. The demand from industry will be for skills analysis, curriculum design, on-the-job competency-based training, materials development, assessment procedures and instruments, accreditation of their training, articulation, trainer training, and more 'open' approaches to learning with learning being student controlled. (Interestingly, employers mean workplace controlled rather than student controlled; a problem to be sorted out.)

National industrial organisations will not restrict their restructuring requirements to state/territory boundaries. They will want national solutions to national problems and (for example) the fact that their head office may be in Melbourne, whereas the skills analysis is being provided by Queensland's BEVFET, will not matter to them, even though territorial boundaries may still be considered important by TAFE.

Although TAFE has responded quickly to industry restructuring *outside* the systems, *within* the systems there are considerable problems yet to be overcome. TAFE teachers themselves recognise that many of their skills will need to be improved in order to cope with restructuring.

College links

Although national and system links are important at the policy level, the actual doing must be achieved by individual colleges and their staff. The importance of College links cannot be over-emphasised. Colleges have developed many creative approaches because of reacting at the local level to immediate problems. College advisory groups (including college councils) are being used to provide TAFE/industry link advice. Over many years, there have been numerous successful examples of TAFE/industry links and the most important of these are summarised below.

Equipment: industry owned equipment leased out-of-hours, lent to colleges, made available free-of-charge, or given to colleges. Materials are also frequently given to colleges. There are a few impressive examples of joint ventures, giving TAFE access to high cost equipment, increasing the ability to generate income, and providing a tax advantage to industry.

Facilities: industry facilities, or joint facilities, used by colleges, often with company staff as trainers.

Staff: college staff released to industry or company staff working in colleges.

Courses: there are excellent examples of effective relationships between TAFE and industry for course development, but fewer examples of such co-operation for course implementation and even fewer examples of on-the-job and off-the-job links. Still the emphasis in TAFE is on process and educational quality, whereas the emphasis in industry is mostly on outcomes. However, industry trainers are helping to write TAFE course modules and there is increasing integration of on-the-job curricula with TAFE courses. Industry trainers are participating in course planning and design.

The importance of ACTRAC in developing links must be recognised. Until recently it was mostly seen as a TAFE body developing curricula for TAFE systems and ultimately for colleges. Links to competency standards bodies formed by the NTB will need to be established.

The training guarantee will have only a marginal effect on TAFE/industry co-operation even though there has been an increase of 23% in private sector training since the training guarantee was introduced. The signs are that the money is being spent in other ways. Indeed, a major study should be undertaken to discover just how this training money is being spent.

Individual lecturer links

Marketing managers are being employed by TAFE colleges. Nevertheless, it is the individual lecturer, or groups of lecturers (departments, schools) who will have to forge most of the practical links and then make these links effective. This assumes that they possess the appropriate personal skills, are up-to-date with their technical knowledge, and are aware of how their activities fit into the overall college marketing plan. There is no evidence to support such assumptions. These are recognised as important areas by

TAFE teachers where their present skills will need to be improved or upgraded. The recent national review of TAFE teacher preparation and development clearly indicates that teachers have a most realistic view of themselves and their future needs. There is some urgency in dealing with these needs.

Fee-for-service consultancies by TAFE college lecturers are now commonplace (e.g. for conducting training needs analyses) and these are strengthening TAFE/industry links.

THE CRUCIAL FIRST STEP

Walking on the present vocational education quicksands means that survival alone becomes the primary goal, and all decisions are made accordingly. These decisions inevitably are made to cope with immediate problems, with political exegesis, or with financial headaches. Although the quicksands will not disappear, it can be helpful to have a map. And that map can be produced through *strategic planning*. Indeed, links between TAFE and industry can only be sensibly developed at every level unless strategic planning takes place.

Unfortunately, "strategic planning" has often become just a list of platitudes, sometimes supported by colour photographs, but of little use to practitioners. What then, is strategic planning? A useful definition (used in the recent two day workshops mounted by the Centre) is:

> *Strategic planning is an open systems approach to steering an enterprise over time through uncertain environmental waters. It is a pro-active problem solving behaviour directed externally at conditions in the environment. It is a means to find a favourable competitive position in the continual competition for resources.*
> *The primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution's future to anticipated changes in the environment in such a way that the acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, goodwill ...) is faster than the depletion of resources.*

Strategic planning is a way of *thinking* which involves creativity, leadership, vision and wisdom.

THE ISSUES

What then are the main issues? Some of those which could be discussed are now listed as questions. They are certainly not exhaustive.

What is TAFE? Should the acronym 'TAFE' be scrapped?
Should the definition of 'industry' be broadened?
Who are TAFE's clients likely to be in five years time? How would they be best serviced?
What strategic planning has been done at every level?
Does Australia need a national training 'system'?
Are legislative changes needed to bring TAFE and industry closer together?
What changes still need to be made nationally, within states/territories, and within colleges?
How are the activities of the NTB and ACTRAC best co-ordinated?
Is delivery to be college-based or industry-based? If industry-based, what are the programme budgeting implications?

Who has control at each stage of the decision-making process?
Who has final ownership of curriculum, of assessment?
How can the feeling of 'ownership' be further engendered within industry?
What TAFE staff development is planned? How is this linked to the system's and college's strategic plans?
How can learning become student controlled?
What college marketing plans have been produced?
Is there a danger of ignoring social justice issues?

TAFE NATIONAL CENTRE REPORTS

The following Centre reports will be of interest to those wanting to follow up most of the matters discussed. (This list shows that the Centre has had TAFE/industry links as one of its major research themes for the past four years.) Other reports have been published by the ESFC and states/ territories.

Bone, J. (1988) *Training models used in industry*

Cutter, P. et al (1988) *Marketing TAFE: effective public relations and marketing for the TAFE system*

Hall, W.C. (1987) *The continuing education needs of academic staff: full-time TAFE college lecturers*

Hall, W.C. (1988) *TAFE/industry partnership: towards more effective relationships in course development and implementation*

Hall, W.C. (ed) (1989) *TAFE in the 1990s*

Hall, W.C. et al (1990) *National review of TAFE teacher preparation and development - stages 1A and 1B skills and competencies*

Hall, W.C. et al (1991) *National review of TAFE teacher preparation and development - final report*

Hayton, G. (1990) *Getting to grips with industry restructuring*

Hayton, G. et al (1991) *Measurement of client satisfaction*

Mageean, P. (1990) *Education and economics: enterprise activities in TAFE*

Sheldrake, P. (1988) *The TAFE system and industry: joint use of facilities.*

TAFE National Centre (1990) *Assessment and standards in vocational education and training: 1990 conference/ workshop report.*

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